

# FUTURE GEN IN SAFE HANDS

A right-based culture, discrimination-free childhood, disaster preparedness, there are many issues that these city based NGOs tackle to give children a reason to smile and enjoy their childhood.

SANOBAR SULTANA |

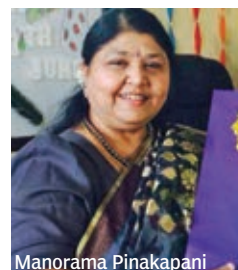
DECCAN CHRONICLE

Child rights activist Kailesh Satyarthi has saved more than 80,000 children from child labour. This restless activist was awarded the Nobel Prize this year for all his efforts and has turned the spotlight

on one of the prime issues that India faces — child right violations in all forms. Like him, there are several activists and organisations in Chennai who have been advocating for children's rights and are working with government agencies to ensure enforcement of laws and designing policies to safeguard our children's future.

## HELP FOR KIDS WITH AIDS

Dr. Manorama Pinakapani, the director of CHES (child education health and society), has helped children with AIDS live a normal life, some of them growing up to become singers and joining the corporate workforce. Manorama started the home in the 1990s when she found families abandoning kids who were infected by HIV. "After two decades, our biggest success has been breaking the stigma, gaining societal acceptance for people with AIDS. People walk in; see us work without gloves, aprons and masks. Today our kids have moved out of our homes and are taking up professional courses, participating in national-level competitions and even playback singing. We are planning a reunion for our children who were with us," she says.



Manorama Pinakapani



Students learn about the Right to Education Act

## ENSURING EVERY CHILD GOES TO SCHOOL

Apart from rooting out corruption through the RTI Act, 5th Pillar, a non-profit organisation, has been ensuring the implementation of the Right To Education (RTE) Act in several schools. The right to education was welcomed with great pomp, but schools have been finding ways to work around the act. Last year, the team at 5th Pillar decided to tackle the problem. "We asked the Director of Matriculation Schools in the city to form a flying squad. The schools were not putting out the admission details. The flying squad caught several erring schools and ensured that admissions were carried out in balanced fashion. Our volunteers do field visits to find out if the process is being implemented. This apart, we have done several workshops to sensitise school kids to the issue. We are currently working with the Education Department to make sure that the act gets implemented and children get into schools without a hassle," says Sindhu Shivalingam, a student volunteer at 5th Pillar.



Sindhu Shivalingam

Children training at the camp



## GETTING THEM DISASTER-READY

Anoop Madhavan, founder of Survival Instincts, is all set to train 1,033 schools in Chennai to be earthquake ready. For the first time in Tamil Nadu, the government and its various departments will come together to participate in the 2014 Chennai quake response drill in association with Survival Instincts. Over 8 lakh students of Chennai will learn the six steps that one should engage in in case of an earthquake. "We are likely to witness these three natural disasters — cyclone, tsunami and earthquake — in our city. Since earthquakes come without notice, we decided to work with kids, to catch them young," says Anoop. The drill, which will be conducted in individual schools, will document and rectify loopholes during the evacuation. "The larger scheme is to get all the schools connected with the *Ezhilagam* (nerve centre of Tamil Nadu government departments) and create a central system of communication in the event of a disaster," points out Anoop.



Anoop Madhavan

## RIGHT TO A HAPPY CHILDHOOD



Devaneyan

Devaneyan, who founded Thozhamai, an NGO, eight years ago, works tirelessly with his team of volunteers to expose children to a right-based culture. Thozhamai wants children to know that it's their right to have education, health and quality of life. "Right now, people live off the welfare schemes provided by the government and treat it like a boon when it's their right," he says. His group did independent research on *Anganwadis* and their efficiency last year and submitted their findings to the government. "The *Anganwadis* were created to address the issue of malnourishment — unfortunately, many of them aren't up to the mark. With our report in hand, many MLAs raised questions in the assembly. We also work on reporting any violation of child rights by the press or the internet and report it to the correct authorities," adds Devaneyan, who also assigns volunteers to fact-find on the field in the event of child right violations and lobbying for specific policies that further the case of children and their rights.

Children learn about their rights at a workshop organised by Thozhamai

